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EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM AND THE BASIS PROBLEM

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ABSTRACT. A radical, and highly contentious, proposal with regard to perceptual knowledge is outlined—*viz.*, *epistemological disjunctivism*. It is shown that this view does not accord with the standard way of understanding the epistemic externalism/internalism distinction, but that nonetheless it has theoretical advantages over conventional epistemic internalist and epistemic externalist accounts of (perceptual) knowledge. Three reasons are offered for why this view is not thought to be a ‘live’ theoretical proposal with regard to perceptual knowledge, one of which is the *basis problem*. It is argued that key to the basis problem is the widely held thesis that seeing that *p* entails knowing that *p*. A case is made for rejecting this entailment. In light of epistemological disjunctivism, an alternative, and more sophisticated, picture of the relationship between seeing that *p* and knowing that *p* is then developed.

1. EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM

In recent work, I have tried to develop a specifically epistemological version of disjunctivism, a view which is most closely associated with the work of John McDowell.¹ Disjunctivism is usually understood to be a metaphysical view about the nature of perceptual experience.² While there is a range of metaphysical disjunctivist views on offer in the literature, what they have in common is a rejection of the idea that the nature of one’s perceptual experience is the same regardless of whether one is having a normal veridical perceptual experience as opposed to being the victim of an introspectively indistinguishable experience which is in fact an illusion (roughly, where a different object is presented to one) or an hallucination (roughly, where no object is presented to one). On a standard (non-disjunctivist) view about perceptual experiences, where they are indistinguishable in this way then they are essentially the same experiences, in the sense that they

have a shared essential nature. In contrast, metaphysical disjunctivists hold that veridical perceptual experiences are not essentially the same as the parallel experiences involved in corresponding cases involving illusion and (especially) hallucination. More specifically, these experiences do not have a shared essential nature.³ From this basic starting-point, a range of potential versions of metaphysical disjunctivism can be delineated.⁴

Epistemological disjunctivism, in contrast, is the rejection of the idea that the reflectively accessible rational support one possesses in favour of one's perceptual belief is the same regardless of whether one is having a normal veridical perceptual experience as opposed to being the victim of an introspectively indistinguishable experience which is in fact deceptive or untrustworthy in some way (e.g., an hallucination). In particular, epistemological disjunctivism holds that the reflectively accessible rational support one possesses for one's perceptual beliefs in epistemically good cases of perception can be different to the reflectively accessible rational support one possesses for one's perceptual beliefs in corresponding introspectively indistinguishable cases of perception which are epistemically poor. Since it is standardly held in epistemology that one's reflectively accessible rational support remains fixed across cases of perceptual experience which are introspectively indistinguishable, epistemological disjunctivism is a radical thesis.⁵ Indeed, I think many epistemologists would hold that such a view is not just false, but simply incoherent.

More concretely, epistemological disjunctivism holds that the reflectively accessible rational support an agent possesses for her perceptual belief that *p* in paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge is that of *seeing that p*, where that one sees that *p* entails *p*. In contrast, in corresponding epistemically poor but introspectively indistinguishable cases of perception the reflectively accessible rational support an agent possesses for her perceptual belief that *p* will fall short of such factive rational support, and will instead be at most some form of non-factive rational support (such as *seeming to see that p*).

So, for example, it could be that in an epistemically good case of perception, an agent knows that there is a chair before her in virtue of possessing the reflectively accessible rational support provided by her seeing that there is a chair before her. In contrast, in a corresponding epistemically poor but introspectively indistinguishable case of perception, such as where the agent is hallucinating that there is a chair before her, she no longer sees that there is a chair before her (since, for one thing, there is no chair before her in this case), and hence her belief no longer enjoys this rational support.

What makes epistemological disjunctivism so controversial is the claim that it is specifically the *rational* support that one's perceptual beliefs enjoy which can vary from the epistemically propitious, or 'good', case to the epistemically poor, or 'bad', case.⁶ In particular, note that epistemological disjunctivists construe this rational support in the usual epistemically internalist

fashion as being reflectively accessible to the subject.⁷ The idea, then, is that even though one cannot introspectively distinguish between the corresponding good and bad cases, one can nonetheless be in possession of significantly better reflectively accessible rational support for one's perceptual beliefs in the good case than in the bad case (indeed, it may be that one has no reflectively accessible support for one's perceptual beliefs in the bad case).⁸ On the standard ways of thinking about rational support, however, this is simply incoherent.⁹

Indeed, it is meant to be just the point of the 'new evil genius' thought-experiment to elicit the response that the rational support one's beliefs enjoy stays fixed regardless of whether one is forming one's beliefs in normal circumstances or in corresponding introspectively indistinguishable circumstances in which one is a brain-in-a-vat being 'fed' one's experiences by supercomputers.¹⁰ It is precisely because the rational support available to the agent in these two cases is held to be equivalent that it is standardly thought that the rational support one has for one's perceptual beliefs cannot be factive in the way that epistemological disjunctivism maintains (i.e., such that it entails facts about the subject's environment).

For if one holds, with epistemological disjunctivism, that the rational support one possesses for one's perceptual beliefs can entail 'worldly' facts, then clearly one is obliged to reject the new evil genius intuition. This is because the rational support an agent's beliefs enjoy will inevitably vary across the two target cases. In particular, in the non-envatted case the rational support the agent has for her beliefs can potentially consist in her seeing that p , where p concerns some specific fact regarding her environment. In contrast, in the corresponding envatted case the agent will not enjoy such factive rational support for her beliefs.

This incompatibility with the new evil genius intuition highlights how unusual epistemological disjunctivism is when set against standard epistemic externalist and internalist proposals. On the one hand, the view is meant to be an epistemic internalist position. It holds, after all, that agents can come to acquire perceptual knowledge purely in virtue of being in possession of reflectively accessible rational support for the target belief. On the other hand, however, epistemological disjunctivism also rejects a central feature of standard epistemic internalist view by denying the new evil genius intuition.

The relationship between epistemological disjunctivism and its metaphysical counterpart is moot. For our purposes we can reasonably focus on the specific question of whether epistemological disjunctivism in itself entails (some form of) metaphysical disjunctivism. I think it is reasonably clear that it does not. For that the rational standing available to the agent in normal veridical perceptual experiences and corresponding (introspectively indistinguishable) cases of illusion and hallucination are radically different does not in itself entail that there is no common metaphysical essence to the experiences of the agent in both cases. Perhaps there is a common

metaphysical essence to the perceptual experiences in these cases, but that it has no direct bearing on the rational support available to the agent in support of the target perceptual beliefs. If that's right, then in defending epistemological disjunctivism one is not thereby committed to defending metaphysical disjunctivism as well. Instead, one would need to defend further claims in order to supply the relevant 'bridge' between these two theses.¹¹

Of course, even though epistemological disjunctivism might not entail metaphysical disjunctivism, it could be nonetheless dialectically affiliated. In particular, it could be that it is hard to motivate the epistemological disjunctivist position without appeal to a form of metaphysical disjunctivism. This claim certainly does have bite. After all, one might naturally claim that if there is such a radical difference between the reflectively accessible rational support that one possesses in the relevant pairs of cases as the epistemological disjunctivist claims, then that will naturally incline one towards endorsing a disjunctivist view of the metaphysics of perceptual experience. In a nutshell, the disjunctivist view of the metaphysics of perceptual experience seems to offer the most natural way of explaining why there is this radical epistemic difference in these pairs of cases—*viz.*, the reflectively accessible rational support is different because the very nature of one's experiences is different. Even so, the critical point is that one does not automatically become committed to metaphysical disjunctivism in virtue of endorsing epistemological disjunctivism, and so we can leave it as an open question for our purposes whether the epistemological disjunctivist should also be a metaphysical disjunctivist.

I noted earlier that epistemological disjunctivism is a form of epistemic internalism, albeit a non-standard version. One of the problems facing standard versions of epistemic internalism, and which motivates some epistemologists to endorse a form of epistemic externalism, is the fact that they offer an account of our rational standing which entails that we can enjoy a good rational standing for our beliefs even though very few, if any, of those beliefs are true. This is not an incidental feature of the view either, but rather a key requirement of epistemic internalism, as we saw just now in our discussion of the new evil genius intuition (the envatted agent, after all, will in all likelihood have very few true beliefs, but nonetheless enjoys the same good rational standing for those beliefs as possessed by her non-envatted counterpart). But many find the idea that rational support can come apart from the truth in this radical way problematic.

If one does find this aspect of epistemic internalism problematic, then one will be inclined towards some form of epistemic externalism. According to epistemic externalism one can gain knowledge purely as a result of 'external' epistemic conditions obtaining, such as one's belief being reliably formed, or having the modal property of being safe (i.e., being such that it couldn't have easily been false).¹² What makes these epistemic conditions external is that one satisfies them in virtue of contingent facts in the world obtaining (e.g., that one's belief was reliably formed). In

particular, in satisfying these external epistemic conditions one need not be in possession of any rational support for one's belief in the target proposition (such as, for example, reasons for supposing that one's belief has been formed in a reliable fashion). By appealing to external epistemic conditions the externalist ensures that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for our beliefs to generally enjoy a good epistemic standing and yet be nonetheless mostly false. How could it be, for example, that one's beliefs are for the most part reliably formed and yet also mostly false? At the very least, on a reliabilist view one could be assured that a good epistemic standing means that one's beliefs are likely to be true. In general, on epistemic externalist views there will inevitably be a strong correlation between the positive epistemic standing of one's beliefs and the truth of the propositions believed.

In this way, epistemic externalism bears a similarity to epistemological disjunctivism, in that both views maintain that one's epistemic standing in the introspectively indistinguishable epistemically good and bad cases can be very different. So, for example, a reliabilist account of knowledge would hold that the epistemic standing of a belief formed in an epistemically good case where the belief in question was reliably formed would be very different to the epistemic standing of that same belief formed in a corresponding, introspectively indistinguishable, epistemically bad case in which it wasn't reliably formed.

What is crucial to epistemological disjunctivism, however, and which makes the view so controversial, is that it offers a disjunctivist view with regard to the specifically *rational* standing of one's beliefs, and not merely with regard to the more general *epistemic* standing of those beliefs. In doing so it avoids some of the problems faced by epistemic externalism, particularly with regard to how this kind of approach, given that it severs any essential link between knowledge and (reflectively accessible) reasons, is able to capture a substantive kind of epistemic responsibility. For if whether or not one has knowledge can be ultimately dependent upon whether some brute external fact obtains, such as whether one's belief is reliably formed, and need not be essentially connected to the rational support one has for the target belief, then in what sense can we properly treat this knowledge as the product of the agent's cognitive responsibility?¹³

Epistemological disjunctivism thus offers a challenge to our very thinking about the epistemic externalism/internalism distinction. As that distinction is normally understood we are faced with the following dilemma. On the one hand there is epistemic internalism, which insists that satisfying an internal epistemic condition (such as the demand that one must have good reflectively accessible rational support for one's beliefs), is necessary for knowledge. This view has the advantage of offering a straightforward account of epistemic responsibility since it essentially ties knowledge to reasons. But it also faces the problem that one's rational standing could be entirely decoupled from the truth of one's beliefs. On the other hand there is epistemic

externalism, which maintains that it is not necessary for knowledge that one satisfies an internal epistemic condition. Instead, merely satisfying an external epistemic condition, such as a reliability condition, can sometimes suffice. This view has the advantage of showing that the epistemic standing of our beliefs cannot become decoupled in a wholesale fashion from the truth of our beliefs. But it faces the problem of accounting for epistemic responsibility, since it severs any essential link between knowledge and reasons.

Epistemological disjunctivism, on the face of it anyway, appears to embody the best of either side of this (putative) dilemma. On the one hand, it maintains the essential link between knowledge and (reflectively accessible) reasons which is distinctive of epistemic internalism, and so (apparently, anyway) it has no problem accounting for epistemic responsibility. On the other hand, because it allows that reasons can be factive (in paradigmatic perceptual cases, anyway), it is able to maintain that an agent's epistemic standing is not completely divorced from the truth of her beliefs (indeed, on this view it can be very closely correlated indeed, since when one is in possession of factive rational support for a certain proposition then the target proposition is actually *entailed* by this rational support). With epistemological disjunctivism we can, it seems, have our cake and eat it too.

Moreover, epistemological disjunctivism also has the attraction of potentially being closer to our ordinary pre-philosophical ways of thinking about perceptual knowledge, in that it appears to take a good deal of philosophy to convince people that reasons always fall short of the relevant empirical facts.¹⁴ Finally, epistemological disjunctivism may have other theoretical attractions too, particularly with regard to the problem of radical scepticism. For if the reflectively accessible rational support we have for our perceptual beliefs can be factive, then that will surely dramatically weaken the force of radical scepticism about the external world, a philosophical problem which seems to essentially trade on the non-factivity of reasons in the perceptual case.¹⁵

2. THREE KEY PROBLEMS FOR EPISTEMOLOGICAL DISJUNCTIVISM

That epistemological disjunctivism does not seem to be a possible position by the lights of the classical epistemic externalism/internalism distinction—even though it seems to embody a happy intermediate view, one that is theoretically attractive—prompts the natural question as to why. As noted above, the short answer to this question is that this view is thought by many to be simply incoherent. In particular, the idea that agents might possess reflectively accessible, and yet factive, reasons in the perceptual case strikes many as plain absurd.¹⁶ Just why this combination of theses is

thought to be incoherent requires some unpacking, however. I think we can delineate at least three inter-connected concerns which are in play here.

The first, and perhaps most immediate, is the concern that such a view will directly generate a kind of ‘McKinsey-style’ problem—i.e., a problem of a parallel sort to that which is widely alleged to face the combination of first-person authority and content externalism.¹⁷ In essence, this problem concerns the fact that according to (some famous versions of) content externalism a pre-requisite of one’s beliefs having a particular content can be that a certain specific worldly fact (or facts) obtain. Given that content externalism is a philosophical thesis, it seems that it can be known *a priori*. But given first-person authority, that one has a belief with a certain content is also something that is plausibly in the market for reflective (and thus non-empirical/*a priori*) knowledge. Thus it seems that if both first-person authority and content externalism are true then one ought to be able to come to know specific facts about one’s environment simply through reflection, and for most this would be a *reductio* of this conjunction of theses.

The parallel problem that faces epistemological disjunctivism concerns the fact that one can surely know *a priori* that seeing that *p* entails *p*. Thus, if one can come to know by reflection alone that one’s rational support for one’s belief that *p*—where *p* is a specific proposition about one’s environment—is that one sees that *p*, then surely one can through further *a priori* reflection come to know *p* itself. But, as with the McKinsey problem that faces the combination of content externalism and first-person authority, it seems incredible that one could come to know a specific fact about one’s environment purely through reflection.

In order to illustrate this problem, consider a concrete case. Suppose one believes that John is at home, and that one’s reflectively accessible rational support for this belief is that one sees that John is at home (i.e., this is a case of paradigmatic perceptual knowledge, as the epistemological disjunctivist describes it). Given that one also (we might assume) knows *a priori* that seeing that *p* entails *p*, it seems that one can further conclude, purely by undertaking a competent deduction (and hence by reflection alone), that John is at home. But now it seems that one is coming to know a specific fact about one’s environment purely by a reflective and thus non-empirical process, and that sounds absurd. Call this the *access problem* for epistemological disjunctivism.

The second problem facing epistemological disjunctivism is closely related to the first, and concerns the fact that if one does have reflective access to factive reasons in the perceptual case, then it is hard to see how one can reconcile this claim with the undeniable truth there are parallel introspectively indistinguishable scenarios in which one lacks a factive reason but where, nonetheless, one continues to blamelessly suppose that one possesses it. So, for example, let us

grant that it is indeed presently true that I see that there is a computer in front of me and that I have paradigmatic perceptual knowledge of this proposition on this basis. We will discuss further below what seeing that such-and-such involves, but whatever it involves we can imagine a parallel case which is introspectively indistinguishable from the case just described in which I don't see that there is a computer before me because it simply isn't true that there is a computer before me. Suppose, for example, that I am the victim of some sort of trick of the light which makes it look to all intents and purposes as if there is computer in front of me when in fact I am looking at an empty desk. In the deceived case I will blamelessly think that I see that there is a computer before me, when in fact this is not the case.

Here is the problem. If, in the non-deceived case, one has reflective access to the relevant factive reason as epistemological disjunctivism maintains, then why doesn't it follow that one can introspectively distinguish between the non-deceived and deceived cases after all, contrary to intuition? For in the non-deceived case there *is* something reflectively accessible to one which is not reflectively accessible in the deceived case—*viz.*, the target factive reason. Accordingly, it seems that by epistemological disjunctivist lights it should be very easy to introspectively distinguish between the deceived and the non-deceived cases, since all one needs to do is see if the relevant factive reason is reflectively available. In short, the problem is that it is difficult to see how epistemological disjunctivism can square its claim that the reflectively accessible rational support in support of one's perceptual knowledge can nonetheless be factive with the undeniable fact that there can be pairs of cases like that just described which are subjectively indistinguishable. Call this the *discriminability problem* for epistemological disjunctivism.

The third problem concerns the very idea of a factive reason providing epistemic support for knowledge. On most views, after all, seeing that p just is a way of knowing that p (i.e., it is knowing that p via visual perception).¹⁸ Call this the *entailment thesis*. The entailment thesis seems right. We've already noted that seeing that p , like knowing that p , is factive. Moreover, it is also true that seeing that p , like knowing that p , expresses a rather robust epistemic relation that one bears to p . For example, the agent who thinks that he can see a computer before him, but who is forming this belief in epistemically poor conditions (perhaps because he is presently dazed after a bump on the head), does not intuitively count as seeing that there is a computer before him, even if he is indeed presently faced with a computer. A natural explanation for this is that his visual perception of the computer, while veridical, does not put him in a position to know the target proposition, and this reinforces the idea that seeing that p is just a way of knowing that p .

The problem, however, is that if the entailment thesis is indeed the right way to think about the relationship between seeing that p and knowing that p , then it is hard to see why seeing

that p could constitute one's rational *basis* for knowing that p since seeing that p already presupposes knowledge that p . Call this the *basis problem* for epistemological disjunctivism.

I've argued elsewhere that the access and discriminability problems facing epistemological disjunctivism are illusory, in that once one unpacks the epistemological disjunctivist proposal properly then neither is able to motivate the apparent *reductio*.¹⁹ That leaves the basis problem, and my goal in this paper is to try to show that epistemological disjunctivism can resist this problem as well. With all three problems discharged epistemological disjunctivism is shown to be a live theoretical option, one that—given its obvious attractions—merits further discussion rather than a quick dismissal.

3. SEEING THAT P AND KNOWING THAT P

One way of dealing with the basis problem would be to argue that even though seeing that p entails knowing that p , nonetheless the former can properly be the rational basis for the latter. I have some sympathy with this line of response, but, as we will see, I think there is a more direct way of dealing with this problem. In particular, I will be arguing that the entailment thesis should itself be rejected. Rejecting this thesis makes available an alternative picture of the relationship between seeing that p and knowing that p which, I claim, offers us a far more sophisticated and nuanced perspective on the relevant philosophical terrain. Before we get to this issue, however, let us first revisit the undeniable fact about seeing that p that it is both factive and robustly epistemic. How is this to be reconciled with the claim that seeing that p does not entail knowing that p ?

In order to get a handle on what is going on here we need to distinguish between being in a state that guarantees knowledge and being in a state that *guarantees that one in a good position* to gain knowledge, even if one is unable to properly exploit this opportunity. I want to suggest that seeing that p is factive and robustly epistemic in the weaker latter sense rather than in the more robust former sense. That is, seeing that p and knowing that p come apart—such that the former can properly be thought as providing an epistemic basis for the latter—and come apart in just those cases in which an agent, on account of seeing that p , is thereby in a good position to gain knowledge that p and yet is unable to properly exploit this opportunity.

One important contrast between seeing that p and knowing that p is that the latter, but not the former, entails belief in p .²⁰ Suppose, for example, that one is in a situation in which one is genuinely visually presented with a barn and circumstances are in fact epistemically good (there's no deception in play, one's faculties are functioning correctly, and so on). But now suppose further that one has been told, by an otherwise reliable informant, that one is presently being

deceived (that one is in barn façade county, say), even though this is in fact not the case. Clearly, in such a case one ought not to believe the target proposition, and hence one cannot possibly know this proposition either. (Indeed, if one did continue to believe the target proposition even despite the presence of this undefeated defeater, then one would still lack knowledge). Still, does it follow that one does not see that the target proposition obtains? I think not.

It is certainly true that one sees a barn in this case, since one surely has the right kind of connections to the barn to ensure this much. But of course that doesn't settle the issue that concerns us, which is whether one *sees that* there is a barn before one, which is undoubtedly a more (epistemically) demanding relation to be in. Here's a reason for thinking that one does indeed stand in this relation in this case, despite one's lack of knowledge (and possible lack of belief also). For suppose that one were to discover subsequently that the testimony one received was false, but that everything else one knows about the circumstances in which one was presented with this (apparent) barn remained the same. Wouldn't one now retrospectively treat oneself as having earlier *seen that* there was a barn? Think, for example, about how one would describe one's situation in this regard were one to be asked about it. Wouldn't it be most natural to say that one did see that there was a barn in the field, rather than to 'hedge' one's assertion by saying, for example, that one merely thought that one saw a barn?

But if that's right, then it does appear that there is good reason for supposing that one does see that there is a barn in this case, even though one can't know the target proposition, and even though one ought not to even believe this proposition (and most probably won't believe it). Moreover, this way of thinking about this case highlights the importance of the distinction between being in a state that guarantees knowledge and being in a state that guarantees that one is in a good position to gain knowledge. For given that the defeater in play is misleading, one is *in fact* in a good position to gain knowledge of the target proposition in this case, it is just that one's inability to defeat the misleading defeater undermines one's ability to exploit this epistemic opportunity.²¹ (This is a point that we will return to presently).

Interestingly, this point about the entailment thesis with regard to seeing that *p* and knowing that *p* generalises to other factive states which are also often thought to stand in an entailment relation to knowing that *p*. For example, consider the factive state of *remembering that p*. Like seeing that *p*, remembering that *p* is factive. If you really are remembering that *p*—as opposed to merely thinking that you are remembering that *p*—then *p* must be the case. And like seeing that *p*, remembering that *p* is also robustly epistemic. Merely thinking that you are remembering that *p* and *p* being the case won't suffice for genuinely remembering that *p*. Instead, you need to stand in the kind of epistemic relationships to *p* that are characteristic of knowing that *p*. Unsurprisingly, then, many claim that remembering that *p* entails knowing that *p*, just like seeing that *p*.²²

But with our distinction between being in a state that guarantees knowledge and merely being in a state that *guarantees that one is in a good position* to gain knowledge, we should be suspicious of this line of thinking. Indeed, consider a parallel case to that which we just considered regarding seeing that p , where an agent is in an otherwise excellent epistemic position except that they are presented with a misleading defeater. Imagine, for example, that one is in a state such that one would have otherwise quite rightly taken oneself to be remembering that p , but that one doesn't form this judgement because one is presented with a defeater (e.g., a good undefeated ground for thinking that not- p). But suppose that it subsequently comes to light that this defeater is in fact a misleading defeater, and thus that there was no epistemic bar to one forming the relevant judgement after all.

Here is the crux. Once apprised of these facts, wouldn't one now describe one's previous state as being one of remembering that p after all? Crucially, however, one surely would not describe one's previous state as being one of knowing that p , given the presence of the undefeated misleading defeater (and given also the related fact that one did not even believe that p at the time). But if that's right, then the chain of reasoning in play earlier with regard to the entailment thesis from seeing that p to knowing that p also undermines a parallel entailment thesis from remembering that p to knowing that p . (Indeed, I suspect it undermines several such entailment theses involving other factive states and knowing that p , though this is not the place to explore this further).

In any case, back to seeing that p and knowing that p . The important point for our purposes is that with the entailment thesis rejected the basis problem is blocked, and hence a core difficulty facing epistemological disjunctivism is dealt with. There is still more to be said on this score, however, since the rejection of the entailment thesis behoves us to look again at how we are thinking of good and bad cases, and how, in particular, such cases relate to seeing that p and knowing that p .

4. A NEW TAXONOMY OF 'GOOD' AND 'BAD' CASES

With the entailment thesis in play, there is a very straightforward way of drawing a contrast between pairs of 'good' and 'bad' cases of perception (i.e., cases which are introspectively indistinguishable and yet which elicit very different epistemic responses). That is, the good case will be an epistemically propitious scenario in which the agent sees that p , and hence also knows that p via perception. In contrast, the bad case will be a scenario which is epistemically deficient in

some significant way, such that the agent doesn't see that p , and hence doesn't (on this rational basis anyway) perceptually know that p either.

This simple picture gains support from a certain range of cases that we might consider. Imagine, for example, a good case in which the agent genuinely sees a barn in good cognitive conditions and a corresponding bad case in which the agent does not see a barn at all but is suffering from an hallucination. Here, we would treat the agent in the good case as seeing that there is a barn before her and as also knowing this proposition, while we would treat the agent in the bad case as failing to see that there is a barn before her and as also lacking knowledge of this proposition. The very different kind of barn case cited above which concerns a misleading defeater suggests, however, that we need to re-think this simple model of good and bad cases.

I propose the following taxonomy of good and bad cases.

A Taxonomy of Good and Bad Cases

	Good+	Good	Bad	Bad+	Bad++	Bad+++
Objectively Epistemically Good?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Subjectively Epistemically Good?	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Veridical?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Sees that p?	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Knows that p?	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

In order to understand what is going on in this table we first need to explore the idea that a case can describe a scenario which is *objectively* epistemically good or bad, and also *subjectively* epistemically good or bad.

By the former contrast I have in mind facts about the nature of the environment and about the cognitive faculties of the agent in question. That the agent is in an environment which is such that even if her relevant belief-forming faculties were functioning properly she would not be in a position to reliably form true beliefs—if, for instance, she were employing her barn-detecting abilities in an environment in which most barn-shaped objects are in fact cleverly construed barn façades—would constitute an example of a scenario being objectively epistemically bad on account of a feature of the environment.²³ That the agent's relevant cognitive faculties are not functioning properly—if, for instance, she has ingested some sort of hallucinogenic drug—would constitute an example of a scenario being objectively epistemically bad on account of a feature of the subject's cognitive abilities.

In contrast, those scenarios where the agent's relevant cognitive faculties are functioning normally and where the environment is conducive for the formation of the salient range of true beliefs—such that nothing in the environment 'intervenes' to prevent veridical perception—would be classed as objectively epistemically good. So described, a perceptual belief formed in objectively epistemically good circumstances is obviously bound to be true. In essence, the thinking behind

our characterisation of an objectively epistemically good scenario is that the agent is reliably forming her perceptual beliefs in such a manner that they will inevitably be true in environments which are suitably conducive to this belief-forming process, and that the agent is in just such an environment.

The distinction between subjectively epistemically good and bad scenarios concerns whether the agent is in possession of sufficient grounds for doubt with regard to the target proposition. The case described above of an agent who has been told by an ordinarily reliable informant that most of the barn-shaped objects in the vicinity are fakes would fall into this category, since the agent now has sufficient grounds for doubting the target proposition and indeed should not believe this proposition unless she gains additional grounds which neutralise this defeater (e.g., she gets to make further investigations regarding the barn before her, which indicate that it is not one of the barn façades). As we described this case above it was important that the ground in question was a *misleading* defeater, in that the testimony in question was in fact false. In terms of what we are now thinking of as a subjectively epistemically bad scenario, however, it wouldn't matter whether the defeater was misleading in this way; what matters is just that it is not neutralised by further grounds. In contrast, a subjectively epistemically good scenario is a scenario where no such defeater is present.²⁴

One last *caveat* is in order in this regard: we will treat as a subjectively epistemically bad scenario any scenario in which the agent either is aware of sufficient grounds for doubt with regard to the target proposition, or *should be* aware of such grounds.²⁵ The latter clause is important, since we clearly do not want a scenario to count as subjectively epistemically good just because the agent—through, say, sheer inattentiveness on her part—doesn't become aware of a defeater that she should have become aware of.

Finally, a third axis along which we can distinguish cases is in terms of whether or not the perceptual belief formed in that case is veridical.

One last point of clarification is in order with regard to this taxonomy of good and bad cases. So far we have been describing such cases as being in their nature introspectively indistinguishable. Notice, however, that we will need to nuance this point a little in order to accommodate this more complex way of thinking about good and bad cases, since whether or not one is in possession of a defeater clearly can be introspectively distinguishable. We will thus say that for any particular case that you plug into this taxonomy the various scenarios will be introspectively indistinguishable in all respects other than with regard to the presence of these defeaters.

In order to clarify the different possibilities that are being mapped out by this table, it will be helpful to run through these possibilities with illustrative examples. As a template, we will use

the general example of an agent seeing what she takes to be a barn and on this basis forming, where relevant, a belief that there is a barn before her (p).

An example of a good+ scenario would be where the agent sees a barn in good cognitive conditions (both environmental and in terms of the functioning of her relevant faculties) and believes that p on this basis where she is (quite properly) not aware of any grounds for doubt as regards the target proposition. This scenario is thus both objectively and subjectively epistemically good, and consequently the perception is veridical. By everyone's lights, such a case would be an example in which the agent both sees that p and knows that p . It is the good+ scenario that the epistemological disjunctivist has in mind when she talks of paradigm cases of perceptual knowledge. On this view in the good+ case the agent's perceptual knowledge is constituted by the possession of the factive rational support provided by her seeing that p .

An example of a merely good scenario would be one identical to that just given as an example of a good+ scenario except that the scenario is subjectively epistemically bad because the agent is in possession of (or should be in possession of) a defeater for the target proposition (acquired, say, via testimony from a reliable source). Since the scenario is objectively epistemically good it follows that the perception will be veridical. Given that this is a subjectively epistemically bad scenario, however, it follows that the agent lacks knowledge (indeed, she shouldn't even believe the target proposition).

Still, as noted above, it does seem to be right to say that this agent sees that p , and thus good cases reveal the logical gap between seeing that p and knowing that p . That the scenario is objectively epistemically good makes clear why this is so, since the agent is, as a matter of fact, in a good position to gain knowledge of the target proposition. Her seeing that p in this case thus does indeed put her in an objectively good position to know that p . It is just that she cannot exploit this fact because of the presence of the defeater, a defeater which, since the circumstances are in fact objectively epistemically good, is necessarily misleading.

Note that while the primary basis on which seeing that p and knowing that p come apart on this view will be cases like this where the agent, though in a scenario which is objectively epistemically good, is nonetheless in possession (or ought to be in possession) of a defeater, there will also be other, more peripheral, ways in which they can come apart. These will be cases where the failure to know that p even despite seeing that p relates to an unusual feature of how the agent is in this case forming and sustaining her beliefs. One such possibility is that of the agent being in an objectively epistemically good circumstance and yet simply failing to believe that p , even though she has no subjective basis for this failure to believe. If she doesn't believe that p , then she is not even in the market for knowledge that p , and yet since the circumstances are objectively

epistemically good she would on this view count as seeing that p . Indeed, wouldn't we naturally describe her as seeing that p , and hence be puzzled by her failure to believe that p in this case?

A second kind of possibility, related to the first, is that the agent believes that p without that belief being formed and sustained on the rational basis supplied by her seeing that p . For example, the belief might be formed and sustained on a non-epistemic basis (e.g., wishful thinking), or formed and sustained on an inadequate epistemic basis (e.g., on the basis of evidence which is insufficient to support knowledge that p). Again, since the agent is in an objectively epistemically good scenario she counts on this view as seeing that p , but she clearly does not know that p given how her belief was formed. Since cases like this depend upon oddities about the agent's doxastic practices, we will in what follows focus our attention in our discussion on merely good cases of the more central type involving misleading defeaters.

An example of a (merely) bad scenario would be where the agent genuinely sees a barn in a scenario in which what looks like a barn generally is not a barn (e.g., in barn façade county). The circumstances would thus be objectively epistemically bad. Nonetheless, since there is no defeater that the agent is or should be aware of the circumstances are subjectively epistemically good, and the perception is also veridical since she really does see a barn. Still, that the circumstances are objectively epistemically bad ensures that the agent lacks knowledge that p , even while forming a true belief that p . In particular, it ensures that the agent's cognitive success is merely a matter of luck, and so is not in the market for knowledge.²⁶ Relatedly, it also explains why the agent does not see that p in this case for, as a matter of fact, she is not in circumstances that put her in a good position to know this proposition, and so the essential epistemic link that we have described between seeing that p and knowing that p is not satisfied.²⁷

An example of a bad+ scenario would be one that is exactly like that just described except that the agent in addition has grounds for doubting the target proposition. She is thus in a scenario which is both objectively and subjectively epistemically bad. Nonetheless, as it happens her perception is veridical, in that she does see a barn. Perhaps, for instance, most barn-shaped objects in this vicinity are not barns and she has been told this, and yet she just so happens to look at the one real barn in the area. Clearly our agent neither knows that p in this case nor sees that p . Indeed, she shouldn't even believe that p in this case.

An example of a bad++ scenario would be a case identical to a bad case except that the perception was not veridical. That is, the agent is in an objectively epistemically bad scenario and in addition merely seems to see a barn rather than actually seeing one. For example, it could be that she is in barn façade county and has the added misfortune of being the victim of an hallucination of a barn. Clearly our agent neither knows that p in this case nor sees that p .

An example of a bad+++ scenario would be a case identical to a bad++ case except that in addition the agent is aware, or should be aware, of a defeater for her belief that p . Her belief is thus formed in circumstances that are both objectively and subjectively epistemically bad, and her perception is also not veridical. For example, perhaps in addition to being in barn façade county and being the victim of an hallucination she is also given good reason for supposing that she is hallucinating (perhaps she has been told by a reliable informant that this is the case). Clearly our agent neither knows that p in this case nor sees that p . Indeed, as in the bad case, she shouldn't even believe that p in this case.

A crucial point about this taxonomy of good and bad cases is that it offers us a way of thinking about the relationship between seeing that p and knowing that p which affords us a straightforward response to the basis problem. For while on this view we can accommodate the intuition that underlies the entailment thesis that seeing that p is both factive and strongly epistemic—since one only sees that p in cases of veridical perception which are objectively epistemically advantageous—we are not forced thereby into accepting the entailment thesis, and thus holding that seeing that p entails knowing that p . But once we jettison the entailment thesis, there is then nothing to prevent us from allowing that seeing that p can be the rational basis for knowing that p . By guaranteeing that you are in an objective epistemically good scenario and that one's perception is veridical, seeing that p ensures that from an objective point of view you are in a good position to know that p . Crucially, however, it does not guarantee you knowledge that p . The basis problem for epistemological disjunctivism is thus neutralised.²⁸

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NOTES

¹ See especially McDowell (1995; cf. McDowell 1982; 1986; 1994a; 1994b; 2002a; 2002b; 2008). For my contributions to this topic, see Pritchard (2007b; 2008a; 2009b; 2009c; 2011b; 2011c; cf. Pritchard 2003) and Neta & Pritchard (2007). For some key discussions of McDowell's own view in this regard, see Glendinning & de Gaynesford (1998), Macarthur (2003), Wright (2002; 2008; cf. McDowell 2008), Greco (2004), Comesaña (2005), Conee (2007; 2008) and Millar (2007; 2008a).

² There are also other disjunctivist views outside the philosophy of perception, such as regarding the philosophy of action. See, for example, Dancy (2008), Hornsby (2008) and Ruben (2008).

³ Of course, they share the negative epistemological property of being introspectively indistinguishable, but this is not usually regarded as a plausible candidate for being a property which determines the essential nature of the relevant experiences.

⁴ For an excellent survey of the range of metaphysical disjunctivist views on offer in the literature, see Soteriou (2009). See also Haddock & Macpherson (2008b), Byrne & Logue (2009b), Fish (2009) and Brogaard (2010). For some of the key defences of metaphysical disjunctivism, see Hinton (1967a; 1967b; 1973), Snowdon (1980-1; 1990) and Martin (2002; 2004; 2006). See also the papers collected in Haddock & Macpherson (2008a) and Byrne & Logue (2009a). For some key recent discussions of metaphysical disjunctivism, see Putnam (1999), Brewer (2000), Travis (2004), Snowdon (2005; 2008) and Neta (2008). See also the recent exchange between Hawthorne & Kovakovich (2006) and Sturgeon (2006).

⁵ Or, at least, that what differences there are in the degree of reflectively accessible rational support available to the two subjects are *indistinguishable* differences.

⁶ We will be discussing the issue of how best to understand 'good' and 'bad' cases presently.

⁷ For a key defence of such an 'accessibilist' conception of rational support, see Chisholm (1977). See also, Bonjour (1985, ch. 2). For some helpful recent discussions of accessibilism and its role in the wider epistemological externalism/internalism debate, see Steup (1999), Pryor (2001, §3), Bonjour (2002), Pappas (2005) and Poston (2008). Note that I am here setting aside the complication posed by mentalist views of epistemic internalism, as defended by Conee & Feldman (2004). I explore the relationship between mentalism and epistemological disjunctivism at some length in Pritchard (2011b, pt. 1; 2011c; cf. Conee & Feldman 2011).

⁸ Moreover, notice that however we understand the rational support in the second case, it is not merely a 'stunted' version of the rational support in the first case, as if the latter were just the former supplemented in some way with additional rational support. Rather, the two rational standings are radically different *in kind*.

⁹ Henceforth, when I talk of the rational support that a subject has for her beliefs, I will take it as given that such support is reflectively accessible.

¹⁰ The *locus classicus* for discussion of the new evil genius intuition is Lehrer & Cohen (1983). See also Cohen (1984). For an excellent overview of recent work on this issue, see Littlejohn (2009).

¹¹ Various commentators have argued that epistemological disjunctivism does not entail metaphysical disjunctivism. See, for example, Snowdon (2005), Millar (2007; 2008b), Byrne & Logue (2008), McDowell (2008) and Pritchard (2008). In particular, the claim in this regard is often that epistemological disjunctivism is compatible with a causal theory of perceptual experience, as defended, for example, by Grice (1961) and Strawson (1974). For further discussion of the logical connections between metaphysical and epistemological disjunctivism, see Haddock & Macpherson (2008b), Byrne & Logue (2009b), Fish (2009) and Soteriou (2009, esp. §2.4).

¹² The *locus classicus* for discussion of process reliabilism and the reliability condition on knowledge is Goldman (1979; cf. Goldman 1986). For some key discussions of the safety epistemic condition on knowledge, including the idea that knowledge might sometimes be nothing more than safe true belief, see Sosa (1999; 2000) and Pritchard (2002; 2005; 2007a; cf. Pritchard 2011a).

¹³ Of course, one way of dealing with this problem is to in effect 'deflate' the notion of cognitive responsibility in order to make it more in keeping with an externalist epistemology. For a particularly clear version of this strategy, see the virtue-theoretic form of reliabilism defended by Greco (e.g., 2010, ch. 8).

¹⁴ That epistemological disjunctivism occupies a kind of default position in our thinking about perceptual knowledge, on account of its being rooted in a commonsense picture of our rational support for such knowledge, is a recurring theme in the work of McDowell. Consider, for example, the following passage:

"My main point in "Knowledge and the Internal" [McDowell 1995] is to protest against the interiorization of the justifications available to us for claims about the external world. The interiorization threatens to deprive us of the justificatory power of, for instance, the form "I see that ..." I insist that statements of such forms are proper moves in the game of giving reasons, and their truth fully vindicates entitlement to the embedded proposition. This ought to see sheer common sense, and it would if questionable philosophy did not put it at risk." (McDowell 2002a, 98)

For further discussion of this point, see Pritchard (2008a, §4; 2009b; 2011b, pt. 1).

¹⁵ For further discussion of the relevance of epistemological disjunctivism to the problem of radical scepticism, see Pritchard (2007b; 2008a; 2009b; 2009c; 2011b, pt. 3; cf. Pritchard 2003). See also Glendinning & de Gaynesford (1998),

Wright (2002; 2008; cf. McDowell 2008), Macarthur (2003), Greco (2004), Conee (2007; 2008), Millar (2008a) and Brueckner (2010).

¹⁶ It is for this reason that McDowell's own fairly clear and unequivocal endorsement of epistemological disjunctivism is usually read, with the intent of charity, as being an endorsement of an altogether different position which accords with the classical rendering of the epistemic externalism/internalism distinction. Greco (2004), for example, takes McDowell's discussion of the factivity of reasons seriously but downplays, as a result, his claim that such reasons can be reflectively accessible. He thus treats McDowell's view as a form of epistemic externalism. In contrast, Wright (2002) doesn't take McDowell's remarks on the factivity of reasons seriously, only the reflective access requirement. Accordingly, on this reading, what one has reflective access to are simply non-factive reasons, and thus McDowell ends up offering a fairly familiar form of epistemic internalism. For more on how McDowell has been misread in this regard, see Neta & Pritchard (2007, §1).

¹⁷ See McKinsey (1991). For a recent set of discussions of this tension between first-person authority and content externalism, Nuccetelli (2003).

¹⁸ See, for example, Williamson (2000, ch. 1) and Cassam (2007a; 2007b). See also Dretske (1969, 78-139).

¹⁹ See especially Pritchard (2011b, pts. 1 & 2). See also Pritchard (2007b; 2008a; 2009c; 2011c) and Neta & Pritchard (2007).

²⁰ Interestingly, McDowell is often credited with the thesis that seeing that *p* entails believing that *p*, and yet he explicitly disavows this entailment. For example, Stroud (2002) interprets McDowell's view in this fashion, but in his response to this paper—see McDowell (2002b, 277-8)—McDowell is emphatic that this is not his position.

²¹ McDowell agrees. Consider the following passage:

“‘I thought I was looking at your sweater under one of those lights that make it impossible to tell what colours things are, but I now realize I was actually seeing that it was brown.’ In saying this, one registers that one had, at the relevant past time, an entitlement that one did not then realize one had. One was in a position to acquire a bit of knowledge about the world, but because of a misapprehension about the circumstances, one did not avail oneself of the opportunity.” (McDowell 2009, 158)

I am grateful to Adrian Haddock for alerting me to this passage. See Haddock (2011) for further discussion of McDowell's remarks in this respect.

²² See, for example, Williamson (2000a, ch. 1). See also Cassam (2007b). For a recent critical discussion of the idea that remembering that *p* entails knowing that *p*, see Bernecker (2007).

²³ Although I set this complication to one side here, I would be inclined to class an environment which could so very easily have been objectively epistemically problematic, but in fact happens not to be, as objectively epistemically bad, though obviously this is potentially controversial. I am grateful to Adam Carter for pressing me on this point.

²⁴ Notice that this distinction does not categorise as either subjectively good or bad those cases in which the agent is able to neutralise the defeater. Such cases raise complexities of their own which do not concern us here, and so we will simply be setting them to one side in what follows.

²⁵ Relatedly, we will treat any case in which an agent merely *thinks* that she has grounds to doubt the target proposition (but in fact doesn't) as also subjectively epistemically bad.

²⁶ It is a commonplace in epistemology that knowledge requires non-lucky cognitive success—or, as I express the point in Pritchard (2005a, ch. 6), that knowledge is incompatible with “veritic epistemic luck”—and as such I won't be exploring it further here. I examine this claim about knowledge at length in a number of places. See, for example, Pritchard (2005a; 2007a; 2008c; 2011a; cf. Pritchard, Millar & Haddock 2010, ch. 3). For a recent critical exchange on this issue, see Hetherington (*forthcoming*) and Pritchard (*forthcoming*).

²⁷ So described, this is essentially the famous ‘barn façade’ example described by Goldman (1976), who in turn credits it to Carl Ginet. While most epistemologists grant that knowledge is lacking in this case—on account of the lucky cognitive success in play (see endnote 26 above)—there has been some dissent on this issue. See, especially, Sosa (2007, ch. 5; cf. Gendler & Hawthorne 2005). I critically discuss Sosa's reasons for ascribing knowledge in this case in Pritchard (2009a; 2011a). In any case, note that any Gettier-style case involving perceptual belief would have sufficed as an illustration of a (merely) bad scenario, and thus it is not particularly important that a barn façade case be invoked. For example, the famous case offered by Chisholm (1977, 105) of the farmer who truly believes that there is a sheep in the field because he sees a sheep-shaped object (which is not a sheep) would also fit this template. The only difference is that in Chisholm's example the agent does not even see a sheep, while the agent in the barn façade case does at least see a barn (even while failing to see that there is a barn).

²⁸ Thanks to J. Adam Carter, Andrea Giananti, Adrian Haddock, Chris Kelp, Ram Neta, John McDowell and Christopher Ranalli for helpful discussions on topics related to this paper. This paper was written while I was in receipt of a Phillip Leverhulme Prize.